

Message Text

SECRET

PAGE 01 ASMARA 00139 01 OF 03 181339Z
ACTION AF-08

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 PM-04 H-01 INR-07 L-03
NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 MCT-01
SY-05 SCA-01 OC-06 CCO-00 OCL-00 OPR-02 A-01 ACDA-07
IO-13 NEA-10 AID-05 /117 W
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R 181230Z FEB 77
FM AMCONSUL ASMARA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4378
AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA
INFO AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY MOGADISCIO
AMEMBASSY NAIROBI
CINCUSNAVEUR LONDON
COMNAVTELCOM WASHDC
USCINCEUR VAIHINGEN
COMIDEASTFOR
NAVCOMMUNIT ASMARA
NAVCOMMSTA NEA MAKRI
CNO WASHDC

S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 3 ASMARA 0139

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: ASEC, PINS, ET
SUBJECT: ESTIMATE OF SECURITY

SUMMARY: SEE PARAS 15 AND 16

1. IN RECENT WEEKS, MASS MEDIA,
ESPECIALLY FOREIGN SOURCES, HAVE POURED FORTH A FLOOD OF ITEMS
ALLEGEDLY CHRONICLING THE CHANGING SCENE IN ERITREA. ERITREAN
INSURGENT (ELF/PLF) PROPAGANDA FROM OUTLETS IN ARAB CAPITALS HAS
INCREASED IN VOLUME AND HYPERBOLE, AND KHARTOUM, BREAKING THE OAU
GENTLEMEN'S AGREEMENT TO ESCHEW NEWS RELEASES CRITICAL OF A
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PAGE 02 ASMARA 00139 01 OF 03 181339Z

NEIGHBORING STATE, IS ALLOWING A STEADY STREAM OF INSURGENT
CLAIMS TO BE AIRED AND PRINTED. IN THIS WELTER OF ASSERTIONS,
IT IS DIFFICULT FOR THE LISTENER TO DISTINGUISH THE CATASTROPHIC
FROM THE NOVEL.

2. BY SEPTTEL, WE HOPE TO PLACE RECENT MILITARY EVENTS IN ERITREA
IN BETTER PERSPECTIVE THAN IS PORTRAYED IN THE MEDIA. IN BRIEF,

WE DO NOT FORESEE AN IMMINENT COLLAPSE OF EPMG MILITARY STRENGTH IN ERITREA SO LONG AS THE CENTRAL AUTHORITY IN ADDIS ABABA REMAINS UNFRAGMENTED.

3. FOR ADDIS: USDAO (ADDIS) MAY DRAW ON THIS MESSAGE AND THE SEPARATE ANALYSIS OF THE MILITARY SITUATION TO FULFILL ITS REQUIREMENT (USDAO ADDIS ABABA 0082 FEB 77 - DTG 141100Z FEB 77 - NOTAL).

4. AMERICAN PRESENCE: OUR PRESENT COUNT IS 61 AMERICANS LIVING IN ASMARA, OF WHICH 11 ARE PRIVATE CITIZENS (AND AT ANY ONE TIME WE HAVE, AT MOST, AN ADDITIONAL HALF-DOZEN TOURISTS OR VISITORS): CONGEN - 10; NAVY - 11; CISCO - 26; PA&E - 3; PLUS 4 NON-AMCIT DEPENDENTS. OFFICIAL AMERICAN PERSONNEL ARE LOCATED ON GUARDED COMPOUNDS, PROTECTED ROUND-THE-CLOCK BY SOLDIERS OF THE 102ND FATHER FIGHTER BATTALION UNDER THE COMMAND OF THE SECOND DIVISION, SUPPLEMENTED BY LOCAL HIRE ARMED GUARDS. THE US MARINE SECURITY GUARD COMPRISES A THIRD ECHELON OF PROTECTION FOR THE CONGEN COMPOUND.

5. PRECAUTIONARY MEASURES: FOR SEVERAL YEARS THE REGIONAL ADMINISTRATION HAS IMPOSED SPECIFIC RESTRICTIONS ON THE MOVEMENT OF ASMARA INHABITANTS: NO ROAD TRAVEL OUTSIDE THE CITY LIMITS, MOTORCYCLES, MOTORBIKES, MOTORSCOOTERS, AND BICYCLES ARE FORBIDDEN ON THE STREETS, AND ALL INHABITANTS MUST ABIDE BY A DUSK-TO-DAWN CURFEW. NO CURFEW PASSES ARE ISSUED. CAMERAS ARE PROHIBITED IN THE CITY.

6. USG PERSONNEL HAVE ADOPTED SEVERAL ADDITIONAL PRECAUTIONARY SECRET

SECRET

PAGE 03 ASMARA 00139 01 OF 03 181339Z

PROCEDURES: MOVEMENT IN VEHICLES WITH TWO-WAY RADIOS AND MAINTENANCE OF A RADIO SECURITY NETWORK THAT TIES ALL ELEMENTS TOGETHER FOR RAPID COMMUNICATIONS.

7. KAGNEW STATION, COMPOSED OF TWO SEPARATE PIECES OF PROPERTY, DESIGNATED TRACTS B AND E, IS LOCATED WEST OF THE CENTER OF ASMARA. TRACT B, THE OPERATIONAL SITE, IS APPROXIMATELY 2.5 KMS FROM THE TRACT E HOUSING AREA. CO-LOCATED ON TRACT E IS THE HEADQUARTERS OF THE ETHIOPIAN SECOND DIVISION, SEPARATED FROM KAGNEW BY FENCING. KAGNEW STATION PERSONNEL CONSIST OF AN 11-MAN US NAVY COMMUNICATIONS UNIT, AND A 29-MAN CIVILIAN CONTRACTOR STAFF (26 FROM COLLINS INTERNATIONAL SERVICES CO.((CISCO)) AND 3 FROM PACIFIC ARCHITECTS AND ENGINEERS ((PA&E)).

8. THE REGIONAL ADMINISTRATION AND THE SECOND DIVISION COMMAND, SEVERALLY AND COLLECTIVELY, HAVE REPEATEDLY ACKNOWLEDGED FULL RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE PROTECTION OF USG PERSONNEL AND PROPERTY. THIS ARRANGEMENT IS OF COURSE UNDER CONSTANT ASSESSMENT AND WE REGULARLY (AND RECENTLY) SEEK CORROBORATIVE EVIDENCE THAT THIS

RESPONSIBILITY IS OF ABIDING CONCERN TO THE EPMG MILITARY AND CIVILIAN AUTHORITIES. IN FACT, THE TWO RESIDENTIAL SITES CURRENTLY OCCUPIED BY KAGNEW'S DOD-CONTRACT CIVILIANS WERE ESTABLISHED IN DECEMBER, 1975 AT THE INITIATIVE OF THE SECOND DIVISION HQ AND WITH ITS FULLEST COOPERATION. THE MOST RECENT EXAMPLE OF SPECIAL ATTENTION BY THE MILITARY AUTHORITIES WAS THE EXTRA SECURITY PROVIDED DURING THE COURSE OF THE FEBRUARY MASS DEMONSTRATIONS IN ASMARA.

9. MILITARY SITUATION: THE ETHIOPIAN ARMED FORCES IN ERITREA HAVE SUFFERED SEVERAL MILITARY REVERSALS IN THE PAST SIX MONTHS. BEYOND THE QUESTION OF LOSS OF SOME TROOPS, ABANDONMENT OF SEVERAL GARRISONED TOWNS, AND LOSS OF MOBILITY ON SEVERAL MAJOR ARTERIES, THE MORE SERIOUS DETERIORATION HAS BEEN IN TROOP MORALE, THE APPARENT UNWILLINGNESS TO ACCEPT THE LOSSES THAT OPERATIONS AGAINST THE INSURGENTS WOULD ENTAIL, COUPLED WITH A SPREADING DISINCLINATION TO KILL THEIR COUNTRYMEN. THE MORALE DECAY IS BELIEVED TO
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SECRET

PAGE 04 ASMARA 00139 01 OF 03 181339Z

BE THE PRIMARY CAUSE FOR THE LOSS OF BOTH POSITION AND INITIATIVE, ALTHOUGH LACK OF ADEQUATE SUPPLIES AND EQUIPMENT HAS PLAYED A ROLE, ALSO. THESE TROOP LOSSES, HOWEVER, SEEM TO HAVE BEEN MORE THAN COMPENSATED FOR BY INCOMING CONTINGENTS FROM OTHER PARTS

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SECRET

PAGE 01 ASMARA 00139 02 OF 03 181357Z

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S E C R E T SECTION 2 OF 3 ASMARA 0139

OF THE COUNTRY, ESPECIALLY FROM ADDIS. IN CONTRAST TO THE SCARCITY OF OFFENSIVE INITIATIVES, SECOND DIVISION UNITS APPEAR FULLY CAPABLE OF DEFENSIVE ACTION. FOR EXAMPLE, SEVERAL ISOLATED GARRISONS, PARTICULARLY THAT AT NACFA, HAVE HELD OUT FOR EXTENDED PERIODS, DESPITE A LACK OF SUSTAINED MATERIAL AND MANPOWER SUPPORT FROM HIGHER ECHELONS. ANOTHER MAJOR FACTOR IN THE TROOP UNEASE IS AN APPARENT GROWING DISENCHANTMENT WITH DEVELOPMENTS IN ADDIS ABABA; NOT SO MUCH THE INTERNECINE STRUGGLE FOR POWER (ALTHOUGH ADHERENTS OF ONE PMAC GROUP OR ANOTHER ARE SHAKEN BY EVENTS), BUT RATHER THE CONCOMMITANT UNWILLINGNESS OR INABILITY OF CENTRAL AUTHORITY TO RESPOND ADEQUATELY TO THE NEEDS OF THE TROOPS EXPECTED TO FIGHT IN ERITREA. FURTHERMORE, THERE IS WIDESPREAD
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SECRET

PAGE 02 ASMARA 00139 02 OF 03 181357Z

EVIDENCE OF A BASIC DIFFERENCE OF OPINION WITHIN THE OFFICER STRUCTURE BETWEEN HARDLINERS WHO BELIEVE A MILITARY SOLUTION SHOULD BE VIGOROUSLY PURSUED, AND WHO ALSO BELIEVE THE TROOPS SHOULD NOT BE ALLOWED TO MAKE THEIR OWN DECISIONS, AND THOSE WHO BELIEVE A POLITICAL RESOLUTION IS THE ONLY FEASIBLE WAY TO END THE ERITREAN STRUGGLE. IN ADDITION, IN SOME UNITS, INCLUDING THE SECOND DIVISION HEADQUARTERS STAFF, THERE IS ALMOST A TOTAL CLEAVAGE BETWEEN THE TROOPS AND THE OFFICERS, WITH THE SOLDIERS RESPONDING ONLY TO THEIR NONCOMS AND ACCEPTING ORDERS FROM OFFICERS AS IT PLEASES THEM. FROM TIME TO TIME THE TROOPS OF VARIOUS FIELD UNITS HAVE REPORTEDLY RELIEVED THE COMMANDER AND/OR OTHER OFFICERS OF THEIR DUTIES. IT IS HOWEVER QUITE DIFFICULT TO ASSESS THE COMBAT EFFECTIVENESS OF THE UNITS NOW IN ERITREA. WE GENERALLY BELIEVE THAT THE FRESH UNITS ARE LITTLE INFECTED YET BY THE MIASMA OF THE VETERANS. IN TERMS OF MANPOWER, EQUIPMENT, AND TRAINING THE SECOND DIVISION IS IN NO IMMEDIATE DANGER OF COLLAPSE FROM THE INSURGENT PRESSURE. VARIOUS UNITS HAVE BEEN AND ARE FIGHTING VIGOROUSLY. OUR KNOWLEDGE OF THE QUALITY OF LEADERSHIP FROM THE TOP DOWN TO THE UNIT COMMANDERS IS MURKY. AND THE BASIC TEST--RESPONSIVENESS OF THE TROOPS, PARTICULARLY VETERANS IN ERITREA, TO ORDERS--IS LARGELY INDETERMINABLE IN ADVANCE.

10. ELF/PLF POSTURE: AMERICAN OFFICIAL PERSONNEL AT KAGNEW STATION ARE NO LONGER TARGETS FOR KIDNAPPING. THE FIVE KAGNEW MEN CAPTURED BY INSURGENT BANDS FROM JULY THROUGH DECEMBER 1975, HAD ALL BEEN RELEASED IN KHARTOUM BY EARLY JUNE 1976, AND NO FURTHER THREAT-

ENING ACTION HAS BEEN EXPERIENCED SINCE THAT TIME. BECAUSE THE KIDNAPPINGS (AND APPARENTLY THE KILLING OF TWO AMERICANS BY LANDMINE) WERE A DIRECT ELF/PLF RESPONSE TO EXTENSIVE USG AMMUNITION RESUPPLY FOR THE EPMG ARMED FORCES (MARCH 1975), WE UNDERTOOK A QUIET PROBING OF ELF/PLF INTENTIONS IN SEPTEMBER 1976, WITH A MAC C-141 AIRLIFT OF GOODS AND SUPPLIES TO SUPPORT KAGNEW STATION. NO ADVERSE REACTION OCCURRED, PERHAPS BECAUSE WE LET IT BE KNOWN WIDELY, AFTER THE EVENT, THAT THE SUPPLIES WERE EXCLUSIVELY FOR KAGNEW. WITH THE EVENTS OF THE PAST MONTH, THE USG PRESENCE IN ASMARA MUST BE, MORE THAN EVER, A SUBJECT OF INCREASED SECRET

SECRET

PAGE 03 ASMARA 00139 02 OF 03 181357Z

TOLERANCE ON THE PART OF ERITREANS, WHO IN LISTENING TO THE AUTHORITIES IN ADDIS FIND THE US INFERENTIALLY SOMEWHAT LOOSELY GROUPED WITH THE SUDANESE AND, BY EXTENSION, A SYMPATHETIC SUPPORTER OF ERITREA.

11. THE PRESENT STASIS COULD, HOWEVER, BE QUICKLY JEOPARDIZED BY A BELIEF THAT THE USG INTENDS TO PROVIDE A GREATER LEVEL OF MILITARY SUPPORT, HARDWARE AND/OR AMMO, TO THE EPMG IN A MANNER SIMILAR TO THE 1975 EXERCISE. KAGNEW STATION, AND THE CONGEN AND ITS PERSONNEL REMAIN VULNERABLE TO ELF/PLF RETALIATION.

12. ELF/PLF PROPAGANDA BOTH INTERNAL AND ABROAD IS EMPHASIZING THE THEME OF INSURGENT MOMENTUM, SUGGESTING THAT THE GUERRILLAS ARE INCREASINGLY VICTORIOUS AND DRIVING THE GOVERNMENT FORCES IN FULL RETREAT. TRUE, THE EPMG HAS NO REAL VICTORIES TO CLAIM. NEVERTHELESS, VERY FEW RECENT INSURGENT "SUCCESSES" HAVE COME FROM DIRECT ASSAULT ON SECOND DIVISION TROOPS. (AN ANALYSIS IN GREATER DEPTH OF THE MILITARY SITUATION IN ERITREA IS BEING SENT BY SEPARATE MESSAGE.)

13. ESTIMATE: WE HAVE CONTINUALLY REASSESSED THE IMPACT OF POLITICAL-MILITARY EVENTS OF RECENT MONTHS ON THE AMERICAN PRESENCE IN ASMARA. OF IMMEDIATE CONCERN, THE LEVEL OF DAY-TO-DAY DANGER, I.E. OF AMERICANS BEING CAUGHT BETWEEN THE INSURGENTS AND THE ETHIOPIAN ARMY, HAS NOT APPRECIABLY ALTERED. ON BALANCE, THE INCIDENCE OF FIRE-FIGHTS IN AND AROUND ASMARA, THAT MIGHT INADVERTENTLY ENDANGER USG PERSONNEL AND PROPERTY, HAS IN FACT DIMINISHED FROM THE LEVEL EXPERIENCED, FOR EXAMPLE, SIX MONTHS OR MORE AGO.

14. ON THE WIDER SCREEN, WE SEE NO EVIDENCE OF AN IMMINENT MILITARY COLLAPSE OF THE ARMED FORCES IN ERITREA. ON THE CONTRARY, WE FIND ADDITIONAL UNITS BEING INTRODUCED INTO THE REGION AND NONE LEAVING. SURRENDERS AND/OR DEFECTIONS HAVE BEEN NUMERICALLY VERY MODEST COMPARED TO THE NUMBERS DEPLOYED IN ERITREA. WHILE TROOP MORALE IS RATHER SHAKY AND STRONG LEADERSHIP IS IN SHORT SUPPLY, THERE SECRET

SECRET

PAGE 04 ASMARA 00139 02 OF 03 181357Z

IS NO EVIDENCE THAT THE MILITARY STRUGGLE IS ABOUT TO BE ABANDONED.

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PAGE 01 ASMARA 00139 03 OF 03 181413Z

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S E C R E T SECTION 3 OF 3 ASMARA 0139

15. IN SUM, THE VULNERABILITY OF PERSONNEL AND PROPERTY AT KAGNEW STATION AND AT THE CONSULATE GENERAL REMAINS AT ABOUT THE SAME LEVEL OR POSSIBLY A MITE IMPROVED OVER WHAT IT WAS SIX MONTHS AGO. THE GENERAL IMPACT ON US OF THE POLITICAL/MILITARY ENVIRONMENT HAS NOT APPRECIABLY ALTERED, AT LEAST TO THE EXTENT OF CONSTITUTING A HEIGHTENED THREAT TO OUR SECURITY. A FURTHER DETERIORATION OF CENTRAL AUTHORITY IN ADDIS ABABA COULD, HOWEVER, UNBALANCE THE PRESENT EQUATION.

16. THE TWO IDENTIFIABLE DANGERS ARE: A) INCREASED HOSTILE FIRE IN THE VICINITY STEMMING FROM A CONTEST FOR CONTROL OF ASMARA; AND B) INSURGENT RETALIATION DIRECTED AT THE AMERICAN PRESENCE

SECRET

SECRET

PAGE 02 ASMARA 00139 03 OF 03 181413Z

BECAUSE OF A REAL OR IMAGINED INCREASE IN USG MILITARY ASSIST-
ANCE TO THE EPMG, THE FIRST DOES NOT APPEAR IMMINENT AND THE
SECOND DEPENDS ON FACTORS UNASSESSABLE FROM HERE.
17. OIC NAVCOMMUNIT ASMARA CONCURS WITH THIS MESSAGE.
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